

Chamber Remarks – 2/21/13

GREAT... LIVING... CINCINNATIAN... Two out of three ain't bad!!!

It's an honor to share this recognition with Phyllis, Tom and Dick – 3 great friends for many, many years.

Carole and I came here on our wedding day almost 48 years ago. Carole had never been on an airplane in her life, and it was only my second plane ride! There were a few people who treated us mean, and did not want us to move into their neighborhood. I wonder what those mean-spirited people would say if they were here tonight!

Our entire family is here tonight. Today is our daughter Simone's birthday! (Happy Birthday, Simone – she's here from Arizona with her husband, Eric Bonaguidi). Our sons, Eric and his wife Traci Slater Rigaud (daughter of the late-great Art Slater, and Irene Slater of Cincinnati), and Eddie with our grandson Max from Boca Raton, plus our dear cousin Lyndia from New Orleans and Chicago are all

here. Also at the family table are our dear friends Sky and Merri Gaither Smith. And so many more of our good friends are here. I am so grateful to each of you. And, so many of the organizations in our life are here; P&G, EnovaPremier, Taft Law, the Freedom Center, Toyota, the Cincinnati Reds, Alpha Delta Boule, my music groups, Fifth Third Bank, Paul Hemmer Company, USI, BKD, UC, XU, Nehemiah, CincyTech , Blue Chip, Al.Neyer Co, the African American Chamber, the MBA, the African American CEO Roundtable, and Black entrepreneurs I work with in Cincinnati, and so many more.

Wisdom is a combination of knowledge and experience. It has taken me almost 70 years to gain some wisdom and to find my true purpose in life. I'll try to be brief, but I can't pass up this opportunity to share just one piece of that wisdom, and to challenge each of you to help me with one major effort for our city that I will tell you about later.

Carole and I would not have been living in Cincinnati, and we would not have been able to make any contributions to our great city; if we had

allowed those few unfriendly people to run us out of town before we met you. And because you embraced us, we felt welcomed into our new neighborhood. This is a giving community, and I married a very giving woman. Carole has the giving heart of Mother Teresa, and she has helped me to see how important it is to give to others. I wouldn't be standing before you tonight if I hadn't been taught and trained by Carole Rigaud.

Cincinnati is undergoing a Renaissance, and the city is on the cusp of reaching a great, new, high level of innovation and growth. The work of the Chamber, the CBC, 3CDC, the Brandery, CincyTech, the Queen City Angels, the City, the County, the Port Authority, and so many others is headed toward creating a new Cincinnati. But we are missing an extremely important component to this potential success. We have not taken full advantage of the power of diversity in driving the innovative potential of our city. We have not yet learned how to be fully inclusive. The person sitting at the next table from you who appears to be "different" might be the new Ed or Carole Rigaud. If only you got to know them, they might become your best friend. We are still

somewhat reluctant to embrace people who are different; but it is that very difference which can make a difference in how well we innovate and grow in our region. It is true that birds of a feather tend to flock together; but birds of a different feather can learn to sing together.

The amount of pent up innovative potential in our city is mind boggling. Just look around this room. We are not including some very creative people, and some important small businesses, who can make a real difference in our success. Yes, we have made some progress in that regard on a number of fronts. But we seem to be afraid to really remove the artificial barriers that would allow women and minorities to take part fully. We still spend too much personal energy on negative issues of race and gender, and not enough on the creative power our differences can bring us. I saw how Atlanta did this many years ago, and as a result they grew their city beyond their wildest dreams. So, I say to you tonight;

“Cincinnati, tear down that wall....!!!”

“Diversity” is not “Black vs White.” Diversity is many different people coming together for the common good. Diversity is the source of creative thoughts, ideas and business concepts which we can bring to the marketplace through innovation. We must all work together to lift everyone to higher and higher levels of freedom and empowerment in our community.

I am dedicating the final part of my life to helping Cincinnati become a beacon of freedom, through **economic and educational empowerment and inclusion.**

This is my life’s purpose that God has given to me. I’m confident that my friends in this room, and those throughout this great city, will help deliver on this promise. We won’t let any obstacles get in the way of achieving this vision and mission. Cincinnati will be the new Atlanta and beyond, reaching even higher levels on Freedom’s Pyramid.

With the national reach of the Freedom Center, we will become a true beacon of freedom, and a place for sincere dialogue and creative innovation.

This award should be called..."It is Great, to be Living in Cincinnati"! Our family sends its love to each and every one of you, and we thank you for embracing us here in our Cincinnati home!

Thank You!

(Ed Rigaud)